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GURU NANAK DEV MISSION SERIES 283

GURU NANAK

The Man with A Message

(PART II)

Harchand Singh (Canada)

**GURU NANAK DEV MISSION, PATIALA,
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DEDICATED
TO ALL THOSE
SPIRITED, STEADFAST AND
YOUTHFUL PEOPLE
WHO
UNDER THE BANNER
OF
GURU GOBIND SINGH STUDY CIRCLE,
LUDHIANA,
HAVE WAGED A RELENTLESS WAR
AGAINST
THE DARK FORCES
OF
ATHEISM, DRUG CULTURE AND HEDONISM]

PART 2

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A CALL FROM THE LORD

Nanak had worked enough as store-keeper and now was the time for him to move forward. One day, as usual, he went out for his pre-dawn bath in the Bein¹. He took dive in the deep water and did not come out. The writers of the Janam Sakhis² are unanimous in reporting that Nanak was ushered into God Almighty's presence and received His Command to preach Naam Simran³ and practice of righteousness to mankind.

As he emerged out of the stream after a period of two days⁴, instead of going back to his

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1. Bein was the rivulet that flowed in those days by the side of Sultanpur town.
 2. The old Punjabi books containing detailed events of Nanak's life. All these books were written before the end of 18th century.
 3. The loving remembrance of God's holy name and His attributes.
 4. Till recently, people were sceptical about man's ability to live without oxygen for more than a couple of minutes. In modern times, some persons have demonstrated their ability to survive without breathing for

Cont. 2

work place, he preferred to sit by the side of a grave-yard and declared himself to be charged with the mission of spreading God's Gospel, Because he was thought to be dead by the inhabitants of Sultanpur as a result of drowning in the rivulet, some people took him to be an evil spirit, while others labelled him 'crazy' by virtue of his seemingly odd behaviour. Nanak describes this attitude of people towards him in these words :

'A goblin', call me some,
Others, 'a being out of his mind'
Still, others, "O no, the same poor Nanak is he.'
But, in Lord's love am I inebriated
To the point of madness.
And now, I recognise no other except Him.

(Adi Granth 901 : 6)

Contd. from Page 1

a fairly long time. In the year 1961, one such person, a yogin, appeared before the staff of the All India Institute of Mental Health, Bangalore, India, with the intent to demonstrate that he can survive without oxygen for a long time. He was made to lie down in a wooden box. The box was buried deep in the ground and the physicians monitored the activities of his brain, heart and lungs, with the help of the wires attached to them. After a period of twenty-four hours, when he was brought out of the ground, he was found to be as healthy as before.

A NEW ASSIGNMENT

Nanak was about to embark on his first Odyssey in the process of fulfillment of the Divine Mission he was entrusted with. He was twenty-six years and nine months old, while his younger son Lakshmi Das was barely a three months old infant. Sister Nanaki reminded him of his responsibility to his family members. To this Nanak responded: "Sister, my family consists of the whole humanity. It does not comprise merely of a few persons residing at Sultanpur and Talwandi."

At the same time, Mula Chand, Nanak's father-in-law, along with his wife, Chando Rani, managed to reach there. In very strong words, they admonished Nanak for neglecting his wife and two young children. Conscious as he was of his supreme obligation to mankind at large, Nanak could hardly be held back by any emotional pleas.

As regards his wife and children the following arrangement was worked out. Sulakhni along

with infant Lakshmi Das moved to her parents' home, Sri Chand stayed at Sultanpur with Nanaki and Jai Ram,

At Talwandi, Mehta Kalu said to Mardana : "A rumour has reached my ears that Nanak has adopted a life of a renounced man⁵. Go to Sultanpur to ascertain the truth about this matter."

When Mardana met with Nanak Sultanpur, the latter reminded him: "You were given the gift of playing on the rebeck. I was waiting for this day."

Mardana. What do you mean ?

Nanak. I mean, come and follow me.

Mardana. Where to ?

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5. The reader should not form the mistaken view that Sikhism advocates the life of renunciation. Under God's command, Nanak had to go to far off places to morally and spiritually educate the people. This necessitated his absence from his own home. After completing his four long journeys Nanak settled as a family man at Kartarpur, In the district of Lahore, where he worked as an agricultural farmer.

It should be noted that Sikhism is the first religion in the East, which taught that the goal of human life can be attained by performing all the duties of a family man.

Nanak. Where the Lord takes us.
Mardana. Your parents have commanded me that going back to Talwandi I shall inform them all about you. They will be anxiously waiting for me there. On the other hand, you ask me to follow you. What shall I do?

Nanak. It you go back to Talwandi and stay there you will have all the physical comforts. If you choose to accompany me, you will have to face nothing but hunger and hardships. Decide for yourself.

Mardana. It is hard for me to go back now.

The Moslem bard decided to stay with the Master.

At this time, Brother Bala taking leave from Nanak went to see his kins at Talwandi.

3

MEETING WITH AN OLD FRIEND

As Nanak left Sultanpur on his first missionary voyage, he Said to Mardana: 'There lives

in the district of Amenabad⁶ a carpenter named Lalo. He is a saintly person. Let us go and see him first."

They both marched in the north-west direction. Not looking for a moment towards Talwandi that lay on the far left, they reached Amendabad in seven days. As they entered Lalo's house, they found him busy chiseling wooden pegs. The carpenter was surprised to see his uninvited guests.

Lalo. I do not remember having seen you before. Please reveal your identities.

Nanak. We are foreigners.

Lalo. That does not help much. In a sense, we all are foreigners in this strange world.

Nanak. Well, I can reveal my identity to one who is ignorant of me. What can I say to him who already knows me.

Lalo. The mysteries of the Lord Creator are known best only to Him. If I am not wrong in my conjuncture you may be that saint Nanak who has been recently manifested to the

6. Amenabad is a town presently situated in West Punjab, Pakistan.

world (by God). (Addressing to Mardana) And who are you ?

Mardana. I am Mardana. (Pointing to Nanak)
His name is Nanak Nirankari.

Hearing this, Brother Lalo threw himself on the feet of Nanak. Soon after, he entered his kitchen to prepare meals for his guests.

Mardana. Our host seems to be spiritually a very advanced person.

Nanak. Mardana, listen ! the three of us our host, you and I, have spent together in past many many ages. My friend, take it as a truth from me. In Lord's Will, we three had played (and worked) together in our many many former lives.

Brother Lalo got a promise from Nanak that the latter would stay with him for one month. After two days' stay at Amenabad, Mardana got permission from Nanak to go back to Talwandi to tell his folks that he was going on a long journey with Nanak.

In Amenabad lived Malik Bhago, who like Nanak was a Khatri, but of a Sarin sub-caste. He was an influential official in the employ of the

Pathan Government, who had amassed much wealth through dishonest means.

Nanak had stayed at Amenabad for fifteen days when Malik Bhago arranged a grand feast for the town people to which the former was also invited. The Master, instead, preferred to partake the dry bread of Lalo and did not show up at the dinner party. This roused the indignation of Malik, who called Nanak to his presence the following morning. First, he chided Nanak for his staying in the house of low-caste Shudra carpenter. Then, he demanded an explanation for his seemingly arrogant behaviour in not attending the grand party he was invited to.

Nanak submitted, "I prefer pure white milk to the red blood of the people. The meals in the Lalo's house are pure as they are earned by honest labour, but the tasty meals of your house are stained with blood as they are prepared from the money unethically extorted from the poor and helpless people." Malik was hardly satisfied with this explanation. There-upon, Nanak, took Malik's dainties in his left hand and the dry bread brought from Lalo's house in his right hand. He pressed his both hands. To every one's surprise, milk flowed out of Lalo's bread and blood trickled out of Malik's delicious

meals.

Malik Bhago's reaction to this feat of Nanak, was one of a mixture of shame and anger. But there were no signs of remorse on his face.

4

MALIK BHAGO'S REPENTANCE

After a few days, people witnessed yet another unusual happening at Amenabad. The Pathan Chief's son, who was in the prime of his youth, had been lying ill for a long time. No medicine, no remedy, proved effective in restoring him back to normal health. Calling in Malik Bhago he sought his advice. Malik advised that the Khan⁷ should get hold of some true saint if he wanted to see his son cured. "I cannot tell a genuine saint from the fake one," said the Khan. Malik retorted, "That is no difficulty. Arrest all the saints in the vicinity of Amenabad. You will find atleast one that is genuine." Malik's advice was readily accepted by the Moslem

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7. The term is used for the Pathan Chief of Amenabad. 'Khan' is a title used by rulers, officials, and of men of rank, having their origin in Central Asia.

Chief. In no time all the saints, hermits and recluses were rounded up and gathered in the town square.

Brother Lalo was grieved to behold Nanak sitting among the arrested people.

Lalo. What happened, friend ? Why are you here ?

Nanak. It is a some sort of sport of the Lord Creator. Let us see what He wills. (After a short pause) Friend, go home and bring a piece of bread from there.

Brother Lalo went home and brought a piece of bread left over by Nanak that morning. Khan's son was asked to eat the same. As soon as he did that he jumped out of the sick bed, saying, "God, God, God." "Blessed is Nanak, by whose grace I have been restored to health. Blessed is Nanak through whose mercy I have come to life again."

Malik Bhago had seen a second wonder in a week's time. A new knowledge dawned on him. He was truly repentant of what he had done to Nanak.

Malik. Pardon me for the offences I have

committed.

Nanak. Rest assured, I bear no ill-will against you. But remember, it is not good to harass and come into clash with God's men.

Malik. You are truly a being bestowed by God with a magnanimous heart. (Saying this Malik fell down on Master's feet)

Nanak. You are blessed (by God), Malik.

Then, the Pathan Chief approaching the Master touched his feet.

Khan. O you friend and helper of the poor, forgive my sin. I have done great wrong in causing all this humiliation to God's people. You are a great saint. Forgive my fault while I am still alive.

Nanak. Take along with you Malik and beg pardon of all those you have wronged.

Approaching each and every hermit and saint that he had arrested, the Pathan Chief begged pardon by touching their feet.

While the Khan and many other Moslem

people of Amenabad acknowledged Master's spiritual prowess, Malik Bhago formally became a Sikh (disciple) of Guru Nanak.

5

RAI BULAR'S LAST WISH

Going back to Talwandi, Brother Mardana appeared before Mheta Kalu.

Kalu. How is Nanak ?

Mardana. You should feel delighted to know that the Moon and the Sun have appeared in your house in the form of Nanak.

Kalu. People, hear what he says ! Nanak had done nothing save ruining my good name⁸ and yet this crazy 'Doom'⁹ tells me that the Moon and

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8. The words used by Kalu translated literally would mean, "Nanak has sunk deep my good name in my own life-time."
 9. Mardana was a Moslem Marassi. Marassis are famous for their love of singing songs and cutting curt jokes on people. These care-free and happy-go-lucky people are often addressed half-jokingly and half-scornfully as 'Dooms'.

the Sun have taken birth in my house.

Mardana. Sir, you know only that much about Nanak. But, Nanak is a man who possesses knowledge about the whole world.

Rai Bular called Mardana to his residence.

Rai. What is the news about Nanak ?

Mardana. He is the king of kings, he is the teacher of teachers, and he is the saint of saints. I see no one in this world who equals him. Above Nanak, only God is. God has indeed bestowed on him an exalted (spiritual) status.

Rai. I am too old to undertake a long journey, otherwise I would have gone to Amenabad to see Nanak. Is there any way you can bring him back so that I derive the joy of beholding his blissful countenance before I leave this mortal world.

Mardana. Rai, Nanak is not under my control. Rather, I am under his control. On my part I will do my best that he

comes here to see you before he proceeds farther toward the west.

Rai Bular was not quite sure that Brother Mardana would be instrumental in fulfilling his deepest heart's desire. He called Bala to his house.

Rai. Brother, please accompany Mardana to Amenabad. You both ask Nanak to come here. If he expresses his inability to do so, then on my behalf, convey him these words :

"If not for my sake, then for the sake of Lord Almighty, come just for once to Talwandi and afford me an opportunity of being blessed with your blissful sight."

Bala. Rai, you ask me to go to Amenabad just once. I can do this ten times for you.

Rai. May God bless you, Brother.

Arriving at Amenabad, Mardana and Bala conveyed to Nanak Rai Bular's message. They added, "He has a very strong desire to see you. Please reach Talwandi and fulfill his wish."

Nanak. At Talwandi there is father Kalu.

I fear he will put all sorts of obstacles in my path.

Bala. You need not stay there for long.

Nanak. I feel overwhelmed by the acts of kindness that Rai had showered on me from time to time in the past. I must not disappoint him.

6

RAI'S AFFECTION PULLS NANAK BACK

Rai Bular was more than a father-figure to Nanak. He had shown interest in him from the time of later's early childhood. It was through him that Nanak was admitted to the Persian school headed by Kutab Din. While father Kalu saw in Nanak no more than a good-for-nothing child, it was Rai who sensed that Nanak was in fact 'a God's prophet, a God's saint'. Kalu had dismissed Nanak as a 'wasteful son', but Rai raised the child's image in people's eyes by declaring: "My whole town flourishes because of Nanak's presence. I enjoy God's blessings because of him." When Kalu bashed his son for suquandering money on the hungry hermits, it was Rai

who came to his rescue. Not only did he wipe the child's tears by holding him in his arms, he reproved the indiscreet father by calling him a hard-hearted butcher, who did not know the difference between a jewel and a rock. Further, he made good the loss suffered by Kalu, by paying twenty rupees out of his wallet. Also, at the same time he made a very generous offer to boy's father. He said, "From now on, I will bear all the expenses incurred on Nanak, till the time he gets a job to support himself."

Rai Bular was not an ordinary citizen. He was the town Chief. His actions and behaviour weighed heavily with the people of Talwandi. When Kalu, through his sheer ignorance was bent on presenting to the world at large, his son as 'not-so-good' an individual, it was not hard to imagine how badly his attitude and behaviour would have affected the sensitive child's growth and development, if Rai's solutary influence was not there at work to counter-act them.

Nanak had not forgotten the deeds of goodness rendered to him by the Rai Bular.

Starting from Sultanpur, and covering a distance of about three hundered kilometres of

his journey he had reached Amenabad. Suspending his journey there, he travelled towards the South. Walking on foot about two hundred kilometres, he reached Talwandi in nine days. Bala and Mardana were with him. Instead of entering the village, he preferred to camp at Chandar Bhan Sandhu's well. Chandar Bhan was Bala's father.

Father Kalu, mother Tripta and uncle Laloo were all jubilant to know of Nanak's arrival in Talwandi. Approaching Nanak at the well they asked him to go home. "Leaving many homes, I have adopted just one (God's) home," said Nanak. Laloo vainly tried to appeal to Nanak's emotions "Nanak, you are a saint. A saint ought to be merciful on others. Look! Kalu is your father, Tripta is your mother, and I am your uncle. We are all your relatives. You shouldn't frustrate us by not granting our wish," said Laloo. To this his nephew responded in these words :

Forgiveness is my mother, Contentment
the father;

And Truth alone is my uncle.

Other relations tend to hold my mind
in chains.

Divine Hope is the son, and Patience
the daughter,
Behold, how handsome are all my kins !
Peace of Mind my mate, and Wisdom
is my maid,
O Man ! do not forget for a moment,
That the Lord alone is thy mainstay.
Forsaking Him, if you attach thyself
to others,
You are merely courting for yourself
misery and woe.

By virtue of the new knowledge that he
had gained, Nanak had completely severed all
the emotional ties with his kith and kin.

Laloo was much more intelligent than his
elder brother. He told Kalu there was no point
in arguing any further with Nanak. Then turning
to Nanak, he said, "Atleast, you should go to the
village to see Rai Bular." Nanak agreed. They
all marched towards the direction of Talwandi.

Old age had taken a heavy toll on the village
Chief's health. He had become so weak that it
was difficult for him to stand up without a
support.

When they reached near Chief's residence,

they found him seated on a cot. As he had lost much of his eye-sight he could recognise people only from a short distance. Seeing Nanak, he tried to get up from his seat. Stepping forward, Nanak provided him support with his hands.

Rai. You should not have taken this trouble. Rather, I should have gone to see you (at the well).

Nanak. You are a great man. We are just your servants, Rai.

Rai. You are a saint, Nanak. Bestow on me your blessings. Also be instrumental in securing for me Lord's benedictions.

Nanak. You are blessed from the very beginning by the Lord Almighty.

Rai. In that case, I wish you confer your blessings on me as well.

Nanak. Where I will be, there you will be.

Rai. I have one more desire. I want to place my head on your feet. Please.

Rai Bular became emotionally excited. He was too persistent in his demand. Nanak was left with no choice. He sat down on the cot to let Rai do what he wished. As soon as the latter touched Nanak's body, he turned ecstatic.

Little after, Rai asked Umaida, his servant, to call Sudha Brahmin to prepare a dinner for Nanak.

Rai. What do you take for dinner, Nanak ?

Nanak. Whatever the Creator sends for me. I have no preferences in this matter.

Mehta Kalu, mother Tripta and uncle Kaloo were still there.

Kalu. Laloo, shall 'I'

Laloo. It is not for you to say anything.

Approaching near Rai, Nanak's mother showed her respects to him by touching his feet.

Tripta. Rai Ji, we have no one else to go to, except you. Only you can prevail upon Nanak that he stays here with us.

Rai. Nanak, I am not in a position to say to you anything. But look to your mother. How does she wail ?

Nanak. Do not feel inhibited, Rai. Say what you want to.

Rai. Please stay here with us. Engage

yourself in agricultural farming.
We'll provide all the workmen you
need.

Rai and Nanak's relatives failed to understand that Nanak was quite helpless in the matter. He was commissioned by God to go to far off places to enlighten people with his teachings.

After a brief stay at Talwandi Nanak finally decided to depart from there. Kalu and Laloo made yet another desperate attempt to keep Nanak with them. With their eyes full of tears they requested the village Chief to prevent Nanak from going out. Rai sent Umaid to call Nanak to his residence.

Rai. Nanak, you need not do any kind
 of work. We will be pleased if you
 just stay here among us.

Nanak. Try to understand. It is not in my
 hands that I stay here.

Rai Bular tried his best to dissuade Nanak in his resolve. When he realized that he was asking for the impossible, he said, "Nanak, is there anything I can do for you?" "Grant me a permission to leave. That is all I want from you at

this moment," rejoined Nanak.

Nanak re-started his missionary voyage. When he left his parents and his most dear friend Rai Bular¹⁰, it was the seventh dark day of the month of Poha (from the second half of December to the first half of January) in the year 1498 A.D.

7

AN INSIGNIFICANT SERVANT

At a time when power-driven vehicles were not available and there were no well-marked pathways linking one part of the earth to the other, Nanak managed to travel up to Mecca and Baghdad in the West, and to Assam and Burma in the East. In the South, he went as far as Sri Lanka. Making his way through the valleys and rugged mountains, and passing through Nepal and Tibet, he reached Lake Mansarowar, situated in the high Himalayas in

10. The reader is reminded it was the last meeting between Rai and Nanak. By the time the latter returned to Talwandi after a period of twelve years, the village Chief was no more in this world.

the North.

In the two continents of Asia and Africa, by a most modest estimate, he covered a distance of thirty-five thousand kilometres, all on foot. Looked at from one angle his Odysseys constituted a long tale of self-invited discomforts and physical hardships. At times, he had to walk through ice-cold mountains, and at others he had to find his way through burning deserts. Often he and his companions, Bala and Mardana, were deprived not only of water and meals, but had also to encounter robbers and cannibals. After all what was the purpose behind his under-taking such long and arduous journeys ?

His aim was not so much to convert people to a new form of religion, as to disseminate to mankind the three-fold Gospel of

- a. the essential unity of all religions,
- b. man's obligation towards God and His creation, and
- c. the utmost necessity of developing purity of morals on the part of a human being

He laid utmost stress on ethical life of the individual. At the birth-place of Prophet Mohammed when he was questioned as to who were the better of the two, the Moslems or the Hindus he answered: "Without good deeds both of them will come to grief."

Though he tells us that the contents of his revelations come directly from the Supreme Being, at no point does he assert to be the sole vehicle of Lord's Word. The reader learns from the inspired hymns of Nanak (and his spiritual successors) that in the cosmos which is spread out in endless space, there are countless number of worlds, countless number of scriptures, and an equal number of beings engaged in the noble task of disseminating the Lord's Gospel. Nanak does not affirm that he has the monopolistic privilege of being the only person of receiving and propagating the Divine message on the planet earth. Far from claiming for himself the special status of being the sole messenger or the exclusive off-spring of the Supreme Person, or even designating himself as a prophet of God, Nanak derives pleasure in calling himself as 'an insignificant servant of the servants of God', which are said to be myriads in number. Far from

assuming airs by reason of the great work he was engaged in, he remarks, "Idle Nanak has been assigned to a task by the Lord," (Adi Granth 150:16).

In the pages that follow, the reader will find narrated the essence of Nanak's teachings, on subjects like God, man, the world.

8

ONE GOD, ONE RELIGION

As the development of love with the Invisible Being and the constant remembrance of His Holy Name constitute the kernel of religious activity, it is but logical that one's religious denomination is of little account as long as the essence of religion is grasped and adhered to. For this reason all the great religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, and Hinduism in its pure form) are the fellow travellers heading towards the same goal. For the reason Nanak never tried to belittle any faith nor did he ever attempt to woo the followers of other faiths to his way of life, which in the course of history came to be known as Sikhism (literally,

studentship). No doubt, he raised a vigorous and relentless campaign against the hypocrite priest-craft of his day, but he urged the common Moslem to be a true follower of Mohammed and impressed upon the common Hindu the need of separating the core of religious activity from the chaff of meaningless ritualism. Mardana, who stayed close to the Master for a period of more than three decades was encouraged to maintain his Islamic faith.

An important query is often raised, especially, by the modern Western man, "Is there only one path, just one religion leading to the House of the Lord?" "No," is the emphatic answer provided by the Master who stands for the validity and underlying unity of all religions. "If one knows truly, one realizes that there is but one religion of Truth (God)," says the Guru "And that Perfect One stays the same age after age," (A.G. 1188:15).

There is one God, and there is only one religion. It is essentially the one and the very same immutable doctrine of God that reveals itself in different shapes from time to time. Referring to orthodox systems of Indian thought, the Master observes: There are six

different systems, six gurus¹¹ and six gospels. But the Guru of all these gurus is one Supreme Being who manifests Himself in different forms. O my friend ! a religious system which enjoins on people the adoration of the Creator Lord, accept that one and attain to the glory." Nanak goes on to say, "As seconds, minutes, days and months are mere divisions (imposed by the human mind on the concept of time and as different seasons of the year owe their distinct character and separate existence to one entity called the sun, so are the seemingly different religions the manifestation of the one Supreme Person," (A.G. 12:17).

Having this aspect of Master's teachings, in his view, Dr. Kurt F. Leidecker observes :

"Europe may have painted well, printed well, translated well, sailed the seas well, and conquered and colonized well, but it was Guru Nanak who dreamed of universal brotherhood and sang his song on unity of all faiths to the accompaniment of his minstrel Mardana. His garments, too, betrayed his universal outlook, as A. Christine Albers, puts it in verse :

11. The term 'gurus' literally meanig 'teachers' stands here for the founders of six systems of Hindu thought.

But why that motley dress the master
wearhet,

Half of the Hindu, half of Moslem
type ?

It was to show that he was both or
neither,

That Truth eternal does not rest on
dress."¹²

9

GOD AND HIS ATTRIBUTES

In contrast to the cry of polytheism¹³ that was rampant on the scene of the sub-continent, Nanak held aloft the banner of firm belief in the existence of One Supreme Being, who could never be deined in words nor could His glory and greatness be ever comprehended in full by the finite intellect of man. But we may describe Him if we will, knowing fully well that no description of His is ever adequate or complete.

12. Ganda Singh : Sources on The Life And Teachings of
Guru Nanak, p. 259.

13. A belief that there are many Gods.

The Ultimate Reality is variously designated by the Master as

'the Formless' 'the Transcendent',
'The Truth', 'the Enlightener',
'the First Person', 'the Supreme Self',
'the Lord of the Earth', 'the Life of the Universe',
'the Knower', 'the 'Seer' 'the Wisest of the wise',
'the Great Bestower', 'the All-Merciful',
'the Rewarder of Deeds', 'the Maker of Destiny',
'the All-Powerful', 'the Doer',
'the First-Cause', 'the Cause of all causes',
'the Creator', 'the Provider', and 'the Destroyer'.

Nanak's conception of the Supreme Person can be derived from his set invocation which forms a prologue to all his poetical works. It runs as follows :

The One, the Formless,
Of True Name is He,
He's the Author of all

The world that we see.
Hath no fear, no hate,
No ill-will doth He hold,
Is not born, nor dies,
(Norh dot He grow old.)
He is that pure light
Whose fount is He alone,
By the Guru's grace
(That Person is known).

The first trait that Nanak affirms about God is His 'oneness'. If the God is to be perfect and complete in all ways He must be one in number. To assume that there are three or even two gods in existence, is to say that none of them is omnipresent, all-powerful and all-knower. Let us suppose there are two gods, 'A' and 'B'. This means A occupies and owns certain space which is not owned by B. It further means that A's sphere of action and authority is different from that of B's. In other words, A's existence puts serious limitations on the powers of B and vice-versa. The natural conclusion is that none of the two gods is omnipresent and all-powerful. In other words both are lacking in something and are not perfect. The conceptions of 'prefection' and 'complete-

ness' logically demand that God must be one in number.

It was not without reason that the Master, in emphasizing this trait of the Supreme Person, invariably uses the digit '1' (instead of the word 'one') before the term 'Absolute' in his invocations to Him.

To state that God is 'Absolute' is to affirm that He can be conceived without reference to any other category of space and time. That, no other object or being is required as a precondition for His existence. That, He is self-existent.

To say that He is of 'true name', implies that we cannot conceive of a universe without God's name, nor can we think of any time when His glory shall cease to be. A world devoid of religious sentiment and devotion is a sheer impossibility according to Nanak.

Here, Nanak sounds a note of optimism which provides much-needed comfort to a man of faith, living as he does in a 'modern age of doubt and scepticism.

God is the creator, the supporter as well as the destroyer of the world. He causes the beings to life, nourishes them and in the course of time

makes them to quit the world. But He Himself is not subject to time, change and death. Time is just irrelevant to His Substance. Change is meaningless to His Reality. Death simply does not happen to His Person.

He did not originate at any point of time. He is there from the very beginning, even before the beginning of time. Nanak affirms :

The Author of Things doth ever last,
True is His glory, oh True is He !
He is not born, nor doth He die,
He is, was and ever shall be !

(A.G. 6:13)

He does not harbour any negative feelings. He is without fear, malice or ill-will. God of Nanak's conception is endowed with positive attributes. He is the most compassionate being, the dispeller of human sorrow, the treasure of bliss, and the ocean of tranquility. He is also said to be the bestower of redemption.

He has the language of love and only with this language can we converse with Him.

God is peerless, without an equal. There is nothing in the world of human experience, He can be compared to. However, if we must

point out to something comparable to Him in the world of our experience, then, in vie of His attribute of dispelling darken (ignorance) from human minds, we can say that He is an ever-shining Immaculate Light. But never forget for a moment, this is just a metaphor. A metaphor provides at the best only an approximation. It can never furnish a true identity. Light as we know is something physical, while the God is a spiritual substance.

One great attribute, almost neglected by the early spiritual teachers, both in the East and the West, but with which Nanak seems to be wonder-struck, is the aesthetic quality of the Supreme Person. God is repeatedly portrayed by him as the most handsome being, possessor of peerless beauty and grace. By virtue, of the over-whelming grace and charm of His person. God is often addressed by the Master as 'the enticer' and 'the seductor' of human hearts.

This is quite understandable. The alluring beauty, both animate and inanimate, that dazzles our eyes at almost every step of our journey in this world could never have seen the light of the day without the existence of the

creator who Himself is a possessor of incomparable beauty and charm. Nanak says :

"O Compassionate One, Thy form of unparalleled beauty illumines all hearts."

(A.G. 1031:7)

Lord's elegance and loveliness are further evident from the following words of Nanak:

"My God is utterly resplendent and dyed deep in beauty and grace. He is the compassionate master of the poor, the loved enticer of human minds, flavoury and sparkling red like the Lalla flower."

(A.G. 1331:18)

In Nanak's writings we find God described in a series of seemingly contradictory terms. He is said to be both the absolute and the related, the formless and the manifested being. He has thousand eyes and thousand feet and yet He is without an eye or a foot. He is said to be too near and yet too far away. He is termed a teacher as well as a disciple. He is known to be both a detached sage (a yogi) and a reveller (a bhogi).

The fact of attributing contradictory notions to the Supreme Person does in no way cast a reflection on the mental stability of the writer. Rather, it does bring to the focus of human mind, the fundamental fact of inadequacy of the human reason to fully grasp the subtle nature of the Ultimate Reality. To say that God is endowed with manifestation and lacking in form is to state that in His essence He is devoid of form and colour, but the world of shape, size and colour is the expression of that very Reality. To say that He is both near and far is to assert the all-pervading nature of the Ultimate Truth. It also means that though He is sitting right there in the heart of every living being, yet in practice, there is an insurmountable distance between Him and the world-oriented person.

God has no physical eye, yet He has the penetrating vision comparable to millions of visual organs. And, His is the real force that is underlying and operating both in the saint and the sinner.

Above we have mentioned only a few of the many Divine attributes which have been sung by Nanak in his devotional songs. He however, recognises human limits in the matter

of giving adequate expression to God's Greatness and Glory, in these words :

Myriads sing His praises,
Each in myriad a round,
Yet, no end to this process
Of hymn sing could be found.

(A.G. 2:1)

As regards, his own competence to do justice to the task of describing Lord's greatness Nanak, in all humility, confesses :

O Lord, not for me, Thy glory to describe,
Thy sake I can't even once sacrifice.

(A. G. 3:17)

10

IS GOD AN EMBODIED BEING ?

Is God a person ? If so, does he possess a body ?

Beginning from the age of mythology one notices an almost tenacious tendency on the part of man to mould his God in his own image. God is conceived by him resembling a

human being, endowed with a head, eyes and limbs. The only difference being that He is deemed to be more so in every respect. Thus, some religious groups have pictured Him much larger in size than that of man, while some others have portrayed Him possessing more than one head or more than two hands. Common to all these conceptions is the fact that God possesses in much more degree all the positive attributes and faculties of man, and is almost or completely lacking in all those evils and frailties, which are inherent in human nature.

Here, God is viewed as a person with a material body, who is highly intelligent, refined in emotions, and possessor of a creative will.

No matter, of what high order personal traits like intelligence and will does He possess, the idea of God living in a material body, represents a very crude notion of Him.

Nanak presents a much sublimer notion of God-head. He conceived God as a being possessing intelligence, feelings and will, but completely devoid of any material substance. He has denied material body to the Lord, as the matter is something that comes at the very low level in

Nanak's scale of values.

The existence of being without a physique is quite within the realm of possibility, though our experience tends to make us somewhat stubborn on this question.

What are the constituent parts of the object we call a person ? Common sense tells us that a person has.

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| (i) a body |] Material substance |
| (ii) an intelligence |] Immaterial substances |
| (iii) feelings, and | |
| (iv) a will | |

The first element, namely body, is a gross material substance, the last three are subtle immaterial elements.

Our next question is which of the two sets of elements is the essential ingredient of a person ? The answer depends upon who you are listening to. For the materialist, the matter, and in this case, the body is the essential ingredient of a person. On the other hand, according to the idealistic system of thought the immaterial mind is the primary element of a person. The material organism is of secondary significance.

The reader is likely to feel baffled at this stage. A great difficulty that he experiences in

facing this issue is his own experience. He has seen intelligence, feelings and will, existing in conjunction with a material organism. Never did he notice them separate from and independent of a human organism. The force of his long, sustained experience tends to make him biased in one direction. The end result is that he is unable to think clearly when confronted with this issue.

His difficulty is somewhat like that of a youth from Punjab who has always seen only women working as nurses in the hospitals. As he has never seen a male nurse in Punjab, he comes to form a very strong, though erroneous view that women alone can act as nurses. However, when he happens to go to the Province of Tamil Nad, in the south, he gets a mild shock when he sees men working as nurses in the hospitals.

The point is that any type of experience extended over a fairly long period of time tends to make us biased. The resultant bias, in turn impairs our thinking so much so that we cease to be objective and start drawing unwarranted conclusions from facts.

The assertion that 'intelligence-feeling-will'

cannot exist independently of a physical frame, is one such conclusion. Logically, there is no contradiction involved in the statement, that an un-embodied but an intelligent, loving and creative being does exist in the universe.

This is exactly what Nanak teaches to his disciples. He asserts that the God is a person without a physique, but endowed with an intellect, emotions and the ability to transform His ideas and wishes into actions. This conception which strips God of His material dross represents a highly improved and refined version of the idea of Personal God.

11

GOD AND THE LAW OF KARMA

Happiness and suffering come to the lot of man under the Lord's Will, but in the last analysis the individual has to blame none but himself for his misfortunes. He reaps what he sows. The 'good' and the 'bad' are not mere concepts. They are objective entities. The individual ever keeps on weaving the web of his own destiny by the deeds he performs in his

life In Nanak's words :

'Good' and 'bad' aren't mere words,
(But 're object real and true !)

Writ you write with your deeds,
You always take with you.

(This is the truth eternal —)
'You harvest what you sow'.

In Lord's Will, O Nanak,
You come here and you go.

(A.G. 4:13)

The Karma, or the law of Cause and Effect, however, is not a mechanical and unconscious principle. That what is unconscious can have its sway over the unconscious material forces, but with no stretch of imagination, can it ever apportion deserts to literally countless conscious moral beings. Nor is the Law of Karma an entity separate and different from God. Remembering that the God is the All-pervading Spirit, the Law of Cause and Effect is the part and parcel of Him. The question, 'Is God subject to the Law of Cause and Effect ?' is preposterous, since God Himself is the Law.

TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE

Here on earth, we encounter two broad categories of people: the self-oriented (the 'manmukhs') and the guide-oriented the 'gurmukhs'). A person of the former type prefers to govern his affairs by his own limited intelligence and wayward will, which are utilized primarily to serve those ends which have relevance to this world alone. Though this man has little interest in things spiritual, he may attend a temple, listen to the Word of God, utter an occasional prayer, or even indulge in acts of charity. But all these are merely the means to further his worldly ends. He is materialistic to the core who can never look beyond the confines of this world.

The narrow interests of his own person and his family members form the centre of all the efforts and activities of the world-oriented person.

On the other hand, we may find an individual who recognising the limits of his intellectual resources and eschewing his personal vanity and

will, makes the wisdom of his spiritual teacher as his guiding torch. Such an individual lives in this world and yet his orientation extends far beyond it. Realizing the evanescent nature of the objects of the world he treats them merely as the instruments and never as ends in them-selves. At the same time directing his attention to the focus of his guide's torch light he discovers 'new verities, real and beautiful', which come to possess his heart and mind and become the main objects of his active endeavour.

The self-oriented man of short vision and low taste, who seeks his prime enjoyments from objects of sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell, is compared to a worm who relishes the dirt and is ultimately consumed by it. In contrast to this is self-disciplined, far-looking, and God-intoxicated individual, who has set eyes on 'a bliss of another sort'. He enjoys a life of serenity here on earth, and also holds for him a future of everlasting tranquility, there in the next world.

Thus, according to Nanak, in this universe, a being has open for him two different paths, leading to two different directions. The one is

that of self-indulgence that leads to self-destruction, and the other is that of self-discipline that takes one to Life Eternal.

When it is said that a life of indulgence leads to death and destruction it is not implied that the individual soul ceases to be at any point of time. It simply means that literally myriads of physical organisms which come to house a particular soul in its long long journey in the universe of time and space, are invariably subjected to recurrent events of deaths and dissolution. One has to remember, it is always the body of elements that dis-integrates every time and never the soul. But it is always the false sense of ego or self, super-imposed on the soul, that suffers in the process and never the the elements. In contrast to the life of sense indulgence, the life of spiritual orientation leads to perenial state of ineffable bliss and peace, which is not subjected to viscissitudes of time and destruction.

While a man of spiritual orientation succeeds in obtaining the prime object of his life the poor ego-centric individual gambles away 'the jewel of his life' in idle pursuits and leaves this world disappointed and empty-handed.

There are many precious goods available to an individual in this world but the most valued of them all, according to the Master, is the 'the jewel of human birth', as it provides a golden opportunity for breaking the shackles which have caged the soul since times immemorial. The state of human beings is, in a sense, higher than that of the angels in heaven. Though angels enjoy all the comforts and luxuries yet they constantly experience the pricking sensation of separation from the Lord. And, as they are subject to temptation, there is 'always a danger of their falling back to a lower state. But a being in human form holds the potential of attaining a state of complete harmony with the Supreme Being—a state from which there is no coming back to the world of mortal existence.

13

NATURE OF SPIRITUAL GUIDE

In the foregoing sections we have made the point that unaided a human being on earth is unable to make any progress on the road to spirituality. We have compared him to a being

groping in the dark, who without the torch-light of a spiritual guide, is ill-equipped to find his way through the dark alleys of the world. If he aspires to achieve the prime goal of his existence, he must take the counsel of a spiritually enlightened teacher.

The question arises, who or what is a spiritual teacher? In Sikh scripture, the word used for the teacher is 'guru', which literally means 'the light capable of abolishing darkness'. In the Sikh literature, we find the term 'Guru' used in three different though related senses:

1. The embodied teacher

In this sense the term refers to ten historical teachers (from Nanak to Gobind Singh), who while wearing their physical organisms, guided their disciples between 1498 A.D. to 1708 A.D.¹⁴

2. The Word teacher

The totality of the written material contained in the Sikh scripture that currently guides the destinies of the Sikh people.

14. 1498 A. D. is the year when Guru Nanak formally started his missionary work.

3. The God teacher

Guru Ram Dass has said : "My true teacher abides ever and for ever. He neither takes birth, nor does He die. He is that Immortal Person who pervades each and every being," (A.G. 759:7). In the same way, Guru Gobind Singh had declared : "The One who is present there in the beginning and also in the end, consider that Being to be my teacher," (Chaupai No. 9).

According to Sikh belief, the above three categories of teachers (or Gurus) are identical in their essence.

After October 7, 1708 A. D., when the physical body of Guru Gobind Singh disappeared from this world, one important question, from time to time, has confronted the Sikh world, in one form or another. The question has been : "It is essential for the Guru to possess a physical body"

We will attempt to answer this question here below :

1. God-Guru and physical organism

Nanak and other historical Sikh teachers

have recognised God as their preceptor. At the same time, they have declared that God, in its pure essence, is a formless (Nirankar) being, without any shape, form or contours. This means that the God Almighty, who possesses the power to remove the darkness (spiritual ignorance) of human souls, is a being without a body.

Conclusion : The Guru can exist without a body.

2. Word-Guru and physical organism

Every time, the Sikhs gather in their temples they sing chorus :

"Guru Granth Ji moneo pargat guran ki deh."

It means : "The Sikh scripture that goes under the name of the Adi Granth, is the visible body of the Gurus." The Adi Granth, the scripture, which is treated as their Guru by the Sikhs, is composed of two distinct types of elements :

- a. the material objects like hard cover, paper sheets and ink,
- b. the immaterial spirit or the divine message contained in it.

The question is : Which of the two elements listed above is the essential ingredient of guru-ship ? To this, every thoughtful Sikh will answer : Of course, the spirit or the divine message that is contained in the book.

Wherein then lies the significance of the paper and the ink ? These material objects are used to make the imaterial 'Shabad' accessible to the embodied human beings. They are merely the tangible tools that help make the subtle Word intelligible to people. In no way, do they contribute to determine either the content or the character of the Word (Bani). The Word which is identified with the Guru, owes its existence independent of any material or physical object.

Conclusion :

Like the God-Guru, the Word-Guru too, in its substance is a body-less entity.

3. Historical Gurus and physical organism

From Nanak to Gobind Singh, ten persons in physical form appeared in this world. They were accepted as spiritual teachers by their followers. One may ask : "What trait or characteristic of Nanak (or for that matter of any other preceptor) made him Guru of the Sikh people ?

Was it his body composed of the elements of earth, water, fire, air and ether, or was it something else, which qualified him to be a spiritual guide in the eyes of his disciples ?

A historical Guru has always two aspects of his make-up. The one is his physical body, the second is his divine power of imparting the Gospel. It is a fact of history that Brother Angad, along with all other Sikh disciples of the early 16th century, for many many years, continued to touch Nanak's feet as a mark of respect to him. However, when the time of dissolution of elements of Nanak's physical frame drew nearer, then along with the status of Guruship, he passed on his 'divine powers' to Brother Angad. At that time, for all intents and purposes, Nanak ceased to be a Guru.

As a mark of confirmation of the transfer of Guruship and divine powers, from his person to that of Brother Angad, Nanak, placed his head on the feet of Angad. Angad had then become the spiritual guide of the whole Sikh Nation.

When Angad was the disciple, he used to pay obeisance to Nanak. But now, Nanak, like many other ordinary Sikhs was paying homage

to his former disciple, Angad.

This act demonstrated very clearly that there was nothing special in Nanak's physical body which at one time was a centre of reverence for all the Sikhs. What really made his body worthy of obeisance for his disciples, for a long period of forty years or so, was his immaterial (divine) prowess of imparting the God's message to people.

What Nanak did on September, 22, 1539 A.D., in relation to Guru Angad, by lowering his head, to the new centre of spiritual prowess, the same act, at appropriate times, was repeated by Angad and his successors in relation to the Gurus that followed them.

However, on October 7, 1708 A.D., following the dictates of God Almighty, Guru Gobind Singh did something quite different and unprecedented. Instead of bowing his head to any human being he rather paid his respects to the Sikh scripture (Adi Granth), and thereby made the latter the teacher of the Sikh people for all time to come.

Beginning from October 7, 1708, the Adi Granth has been acting as the spiritual preceptor

of the Sikh people. That divine Light (Spirit) which while residing in the ten different bodies guided the spiritual affairs of the Sikhs upto October 7, 1708, for a period of two hundred and ten years, the very same Light now abides in the Sikh scripture. That is the reason, we Sikhs, now accord the same kind of reverence to 'him', which was once accorded to ten historical Gurus, by the Sikhs of their times.

The physical bodies of ten historical teachers, from Nanak to Gobind Singh were different from one another, What was common to all of them and what enabled them to assume the role of Guruship, was the unique Spirit that inhabited their physical frames. That Spirit possesses neither any figure nor any shape of its own. This spirit, adopting the form of the Word (Shabad or Bani), through the pages of Guru Granth Sahib, is now guiding the Sikhs in the sphere of spiritualism. In other words, this Word is our Guru¹⁵ now.

15. The reader should note that the idea of 'Guruship', which is characteristically an Indian concept, existed long before Sikhism came into being. However, for all other systems of Indian religious thought, which believe in the necessity of a Guru for the furtherance of the spiritual

THE HOUSEHOLDER SAINT

Instead of advocating the conventional Hindu method of seeking redemption from the ills of the world by retreating to hill-tops and mountain caves, the Master showed his audience a new way of achieving the same goal by leading wholesome and holy life of a householder. He did not share the contemporary belief that household involvements necessarily act as barriers to a life of higher consciousness. In essence, it is not the involvement of the body as such, but the mind that may or may not, provide real obstacles in the path of the seeker. An individual who is physically separated from the society of individuals is still really entangled in it, if he is cherishing the desires for sense objects. On

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ends of a seeker, the Guru is always thought to be an individual walking on two legs. It is Sikhism alone which abandoning the necessity of an embodied individual, has come to put its faith on the body-less Shabad, a mere Word, as the spiritual teacher of the seekers of Truth. We are not aware, if this innovation introduced by the Sikh Gurus in Sikhism, has a parallel anywhere else in the world.

the other hand, shouldering all the obligations of the corporate life if he can keep his mind fully detached he stands on a much more firm ground. What really matters is one's attitude to life. Pointing to the water-hen that gently glides and makes its way through the thick reeds, but does not let its feathers defiled by the mire of the lake, the Master asks his disciples to weather the sea of existence with all its storms and tempests, with a pure heart and a determined will.

Fulfilment of manifold secular responsibilities was made one of the religious obligations of the spiritual seeker. With the mind ever set on the Lord and hands laid upon an economically rewarding occupation, one should earn his livelihood through honest means. A significant portion of such earnings must go to the sick, the poor, and the handicapped members of society. The act of sharing one's goods with others goes a long way in its consequences. Not only does it help materially the unprivileged members of society, but in a mysterious way, it also benefits the donor. "He who earns with the sweat of his labour and shares the fruits of his toil with others, he sees the way," (A.G. 1245:17)

JOURNEY IN THE WORLD

Human existence on earth has both positive and negative aspects. The processes of birth and death are obviously painful. Nank adds that the very existence on this planet is fraught with misery and torments. To be in the world and not to be subjected to suffering are two contradictory notions.

But Nanak's is not a doctrine of despair. Life in this world is not a meaningless procession of events. It is pregnant with profound meaning and purpose. By steering a course shown by a spiritual teacher one can take care of one's life, both 'here and hereafter'. And a state of Freedom from the ills of existence can be achieved while one is still wearing a physical frame composed of five elements. Incidentally, the physical organism though deemed as a useful vehicle for the advancement of the spiritual ends is not considered as an essential element of a human being. The essence of a being lies in his spirit. The physical apparatus is referred to by Nanak as a mere covering, a garment of

the spirit, which can be changed, renewed, or even discarded away for good. The state of dropping or throwing away the body for good, by of dropping or throwing away the body for good, by the soul, constitutes a state of Freedom according to Nanak.

The world is compared to inn, a transit camp, where a being halts for a night takes a brief rest, and then marches forward at the appearance of the dawn. What a pity! A man losing his perspective comes to take this world as his home, behaves the way he does, and thereby causes for him (and for others) untold miseries.

Though life on earth is just a sojourn, the death in itself is not necessarily an end of the process. After death, an individual may go back to his real home—the Lord's Home, if he has steered his course according to the counsel of a spiritual guide. But more often, death is followed merely by a change in another life-form that takes place on any of the infinite number of planets, of which our earth is but a one. Nanak clearly states that there are an infinite number karambhumis or earths in the universe to practise 'right' and 'wrong' for the living

beings. In Jap Ji, the first book of the Sikh scripture, we read :

Thy abodes are countless !
Beyond reach, far distant,
Thy worlds are countless !
Even the term 'countless'
Is woefully inadequate,
(But then, how without words
Thy glory can one delineate ?)

(A.G. 4 : 6)

In Jap ji, again :

Worlds below nether world
And heavens above heaven,
Are millions upon millions,
(Their count's beyond my pen !)

(A.G. 5 : 2)

Again, in Hymn 35 of Jap Ji, Nanak states :

What dost you find above described
It's the Dharma—the Deed's sphere,
Here we start the account of Giana
—Domain of Knowledge, for you to hear.

Myriad a kind air, fire, water,
Know you myriad Shivas and Krishnas !

Of myriad a form, colour, costume,
Are being created the myriad Brahmas !
Many gold mounts and action arenas¹⁶
Are being instructed the many Dhruvas !
Many you know spheres, and the worlds,
Many the suns, the moons and the Indras !
(A.G. 7 : 14)

16

THE PATH AND THE GOAL

In order to cut asunder the birth-death chain and the evil of suffering that attends each existence, the individual is exhorted by the Master to break the vicious circle by his will, and ferry across the turbulent sea of existence. The Master, however, is well aware that this is not as easily achieved as it is said. To start with, every individual come across on his path serious obstacles which are provided not only by the forces lying without, but also from the

16. There are countless earths and planets which serve as stages for the practice of deeds by the creatures endowed with moral discrimination and effort. Our earth is not the only place inhabited by the living beings capable of moral action.

ones lying within him. On the objective side is a host of material objects which yield countless pleasant sensations of subtle and gross nature. On the subjective side are deeply ingrained forces of human nature like sex urge, anger, avarice, attachment and the sense of I—amness. These external and internal factors drive the individual to reach out, to grasp, to taste, and to preserve those objects and relations which are found to be pleasant to the mind. The captivating maze, created by the interplay of the forces acting from within and the attractions operating from without, proves too strong and irresistible for the individual. He is simply caught in, as if, between the two whirling stones of a grinding mill. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the individual does not recognise the seriousness of his condition, and as a consequence, does not feel the urge of getting out of his predicament. From time to time, God sends on earth enlightened beings to help the erring humanity get out of the mire of sense pleasures. As it has been stated in the preceding sections, left to his own resources, man is unable to set in order his own affairs. He stands in need of a

counsel from an enlightened teacher, And even if he cares to listen to such a teacher, the prime goal of his existence, is not attained without great sweat and hard work on his own part.

But where there is a will there is a way. When an individual in right earnest sets himself to tread the path shown by an enlightened spiritual guide, he ultimately succeeds in reaching the Goal of Freedom, through the grace of the Benevolent Lord.

Freedom, in the last analysis, is conceived by Nanak, to be dependent upon Lord's Will, but human effort is considered as a necessary ingredient in the whole process. God does not act arbitrarily in the matter of bestowing His favours, He is a just and true being who rewards every sincere effort of the spiritual seeker. Thus, human effort is viewed as a pre-requisite for the attainment of the highest end of life on the earth.

The state of Freedom is the state of complete dissolution of one's erroneous sense of individuality, resulting in complete oneness with the Absolute Being. it is like a merger of a drop of water in the vast ocean . . . But we must stop here. As the rest that follows, according to Nanak, is 'an untellable tale'. But

just to convey an idea one can say that the state of merger of the individual self with the Supreme Self is an ineffable experience of Bliss and Peace, of a unique order, quite distinct and different from any experience arising out of the contact of human senses with objects in space and time.

17

SOCIAL REFORMS

Nanak was a great revolutionary and social reformer of his times, who single-handed, waged an open and relentless war against the socio-religious system of his times. Throughout his life he worked for the demolition of the inhuman and unjust structure that was the creation of the privileged Brahminic class. He affirmed that all human beings were equal, there was no high and no low. The conduct, not the birth, ought to be the determining factor of individual's social status. By precept, as well as by example, he made a deep dig at the roots of the caste system, which had become the chronic cancer of the Indian society. As a

practical measure to promote equality of status among his followers, he introduced the institution of the common kitchen, where all people, irrespective of their birth and colour, were required to sit and dine at the same place.

This happened at a time, when, not to speak of the four main castes of Hinduism, even the people belonging to different subcastes of high Brahminic class, found it difficult to drink and dine at one place¹⁷. In contrast to this, in the

17. To start with there was only one caste of Brahminic priests which performed the ceremonies related to yajna, birth, marriage and death. In the course of time, the Brahminic priests specialized themselves in different fields. Those who occupied themselves in performing the funeral rites of the dead were given the title of 'Maha-Brahmins'. Since the act of performing a funeral rite was considered socially low in nature, the Maha-Brahmins came to be looked down upon by the priests performing ceremonies related to yajna, birth and marriage. This was the beginning of the process of crystalization of subcastes within the Brahminic caste.

The Maha-Brahmins, despite the seemingly honourable title accorded to them, were actually low-caste Brahmins, who came to be hated and discriminated against by the high sub-caste Brahmins. As the Sudras Vaishyas and Kshatriyas were not allowed to inter-dine and inter-marry with the Brahminic class, in the same way the Maha-

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newly established Sikh temples, the Sudras, the Vaishyas, the Kshatriyas and even the Moslems, could be seen sharing meals together.

He was the first to offer to Indian society, and for that matter to the world at large, the ideal of a 'householder saint'. After having completed his long journeys, he founded on the banks of river Ravi, a town named Kartarpur (literally, the abode of the Creator), and settled there with his wife and two children. There he set up an agricultural farm and himself worked as an ordinary worker in it. He showed, by his own example, that redemption from the bonds of the world of space and time, could be attained while the individual was still involved in all its activities. Woman's equal right with man was recognised by him after centuries of the subjugation of the fair sex. The practices of idol worship and ritualism were declared to be useless exercises and found no place in his

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Brahmins were denied the right of interdining and inter-marriage with the Brahmins of high sub-castes.

With the passage of time, dozens of sub-groups crystalized within the Brahminic class itself, each with a gradation of high and low.

system. Manual work, which by virtue of its long association with the low-caste Sudra class, had come to be despised by the Indian masses, received a new perspective and added lustre, from the disciples of the Master. Seemingly low menial tasks performed at the holy congregations, came to be recognised by his disciples as acts of supreme spiritual merit. Now one could witness the disciples cheerfully engaged in the acts of hauling on their heads cereals, fuel and water for the community kitchen, washing, soiled dishes, and dusting the shoes of the people attending the holy congregations addressed by the Master.

Taking religion from the hidden caves of the Rishies and the high towers of the Brahminic priestcraft he brought it down to the door of the ordinary individual. Discarding Sanskrit, the language of the small minority of the elite, he presented his message in the simple language understood by the masses. Stripping religion from its intricate theories he made its tenets intelligible to the common man.

In the land of polytheism, superstition, idolatory, bigotry birth-sex distinctions, spiritual degeneration, general demoralization and inertia,

the Master succeeded in erecting in the plains of Punjab, a solid edifice of homogeneous society of God-fearing, hard working, helping and sharing individuals, wedded to the twin ideals of 'monotheism' and 'householder-sainthood'. The members of this new society, whose number rose to thousands in the life time of the Master, enjoyed a status of social equality—a fact that never was in the recorded history of India. These people were given by the Master the un-ostentatious title of being the 'learners' or 'students' (the Sikhs).

The Master endeared himself to people of all faiths. By reason of the universal and catholic character of his teachings, both the Hindus and the Moslems came to regard him as their spiritual mentor. So much so that when he breathed his last at the ripe age of seventy at Katarpur (now in West Punjab Pakistan), a serious argument developed between the followers of two faiths, over the issue of disposal of his dead body. Where as the Moslems wanted to give it a decent burial according to the Islamic Law, the Hindus wanted to cremate the body in accordance with the traditional Hindu way. Truly, a unique honour that a Lord's

servant ever received in his own day and in his own land !¹⁸

18

PLACE OF MIRACLES IN SIKHISM

Above, we have touched upon some of the many seemingly extraordinarily events related to Nanak. In this age of interrogation the modern man finds it hard to put his trust in the unusual events and happenings that he finds recorded in the history of religion. Among the present-day disciples of Nanak, there are many who profess to accept his moral and religious teachings, yet find it hard to put their faith in many of unusual events that are recorded in the Janam Sakhis. An essential point that needs to be stressed here is that one can truly be a

18. The reader may be curious to know about the outcome of the dispute between the contending parties. It was amicably resolved as a result of mysterious disappearance of Master's corpse. There remained behind only a sheet of white cloth covering a heap of fresh flowers. The cloth was divided into two pieces. The Moslems gave a burial to their piece while the Hindus cremated their portion of the cloth.

be a disciple of Nanak even without resting his faith on any of the uncommon happenings associated with his life. Unlike Christianity, the miracles associated with the Master, do not form a part of the Sikh scripture, and consequently, one's belief or disbelief in them, has no bearing at all on one's being a Sikh.

Almost All Janam Sakhis tell us that when the Master breathed his last his body disappeared before it could be disposed off through burial or cremation. The non-acceptance of this fact by an individual does not bar him from being a Sikh, nor does its acceptance, help him in any way in the matter of his spiritual growth. In Christainity, however, it is quite a different matter. A Christian must of necessity put his faith in the event of Jesus Christ's immaculate birth, as well as, in that of his rising from the dead three days after his crucifixion and burial. Saint Paul writes : "And if Christ has not risen, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is devoid of truth and is fruitless—without effect, empty, imaginary and unfounded . . . And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is mere delusion and you are

still in your sins—that is under control and penalty of sin. And further, those who have died in Christ have perished—are lost.¹⁹

The reader may be interested in knowing Master's views on the subject of miracles. In his view, the events and happening that appear to be miracles to the finite intellect of man, are just the manifestations of the infinite power of the Almighty. Again, this Divine power may find its expression through the vehicle of a human being. There is really nothing 'miraculous' or uncommon about the supernatural powers. They are indeed the entities which develop normally in the person of Lord's devotees, as a result of his sustained ethical and spiritual discipline, as he progresses on the road of spiritualism. These powers are termed by Nanak as the 'house-maids' of the Lord's saints' and follow them, as do the servants their masters.

Nanak, however, down-plays their importance and accords them no place in his system of thought. He cautions his disciples not to make the development of supernormal powers as the

19. New Testament : 1 Corinthians 15—14, 17 and 18.

ends of their endeavour. For an expressed interest in these things tends to lead the seeker away from the path of his spiritual quest. A being who becomes fascinated by these powers runs the risk of jeopardizing the attainment of true goal of his life.

About Ourselves

Guru Nanak Dev Mission came into being in the year 1963 with the sole aim of imparting the message of Sikh Gurus to general public, and aspecially to the people of younger generation. For this end in view it provides reading material in the form of booklets, everymonth, in Punjabi, English and Hindi.

The Mission is a non-profit organisation. None of its worker or executive members is a paid employee. Accordingly the booklets are made available for free distribution at mere cost price. Members of the Mission get these free of charge.

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Secretary

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